

Vietnam Will Allow Exodus of Chinese by Sea

By Jay Mathews

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HONG KONG—Vietnam announced last night that it will allow the evacuation by sea of its Chinese residents, opening the way for what could be one of the largest and most rapid population migrations in recent history.

Radio Hanoi said Chinese Ambassador Chen Chi-feng has been given a note saying ships sent by Peking could pick up any of the estimated 1.8 million ethnic Chinese in the country who may wish to leave, a number Peking expects to equal or exceed the total number of refugees in the mass exodus from Vietnam since 1975.

The decision indicates Vietnam has resigned itself to the loss of a substantial part of its labor force at a time of great economic distress in order to appease its powerful northern neighbor and rid itself of troublesome members of a large minority group.

Without any assistance from Peking, about 105,000 ethnic Chinese have already fled to China in the last year, most of them arriving in southern China in the last three months. Vietnam has imposed harsh economic measures against Chinese shopkeepers and others who refuse to become Vietnamese citizens.

Chinese officials have said they expect a total of perhaps 300,000 refugees, but reports from

those Chinese who have already left Vietnam indicate that an organized sea evacuation could create pressures for a far greater exodus, particularly in southern Vietnam, where most of the ethnic Chinese live.

Relatives of previous evacuees who have fled here as well as to China are expected to want to rejoin their families and hundreds of thousands of others are expected to be anxious to take the only easy escape route from the worsening economic conditions in Vietnam's recently conquered southern half.

"When they heard the news [of Peking's offer to send ships] everyone started packing their

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bags," said Cheung Yuk-lan, a textile worker from Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon) who arrived here last week on a special refugee flight for ethnic Chinese with relatives in Hong Kong. She added that most of her Chinese neighbors, however, had only faint hopes that Vietnam would actually let the Chinese ships in.

Pro-Peking newspapers here reported that four large cargo vessels docked at the Chinese port of Whampoa near Canton had already been converted into passenger liners and would soon set sail for Vietnam.

Radio Hanoi said Chinese ships could begin the evacuation on June 20 but would only be allowed to enter Vietnamese ports after complying with all existing Vietnamese procedures required for other foreign vessels and could only sail to ports designated by Hanoi.

Since the pro-U.S. South Vietnamese government fell in 1975, an estimated 220,000 persons, most of them ethnic Vietnamese, have left.

A Vietnamese Foreign Ministry statement encouraged ethnic Chinese to "stay in Vietnam without any anxiety, lead a normal life and join the people . . . in building socialism in Vietnam." But it said all who wish to go could if they "complied with all the exit procedures."

The statement said Vietnam was agreeing to the evacuation "to create favorable conditions" for healing the split between the two countries. It again rejected the Chinese allegations that it was "ostracizing, persecuting and expelling" its Chinese residents.

China, having announced it would evacuate all willing Chinese, now creates the problem of feeding, housing and finding productive work in its own overcrowded countryside for the mass influx.

Radio broadcasts from southern Chinese provinces say most of the earlier arriving refugees have been placed in long-established state farms for overseas Chinese, but the influx has forced many previous residents out of their homes. Such dislocations apparently have only begun.

Peking has turned the exodus of Chinese from Vietnam into a multimedia propaganda campaign designed to win favor with the 40 million overseas Chinese.

By contrast, Peking's Nationalist Chinese rivals on Taiwan have been

reluctant to accept even Chinese from Vietnam who hold Taiwan passports.

Diplomatic sources here say the Vietnamese have agreed to let the Chinese ships in only on the condition that no draft-age men will be evacuated, indicating the refugee population may be heavily weighted toward the old and the young.

China also has used the propaganda campaign to embarrass the Hanoi government, whose close connections to Moscow bother the Chinese. Diplomatic sources here with links to Hanoi say there is a strong expectation that the Chinese and Vietnamese shortly will recall their ambassadors.

The Japan Broadcasting Corp. yesterday quoted Chinese Vice Chairman Teng Hsiao-ping as saying China had suspended part of its economic aid to Vietnam. News agencies from Tokyo also said Peking and recalled about 1,000 technicians from Vietnam. Statements from trade officials here indicated China had also ordered the Vietnamese trade mission to vacate the Bank of China building in Hong Kong.

The pro-Peking Hong Kong daily Wen Wei Pao reported yesterday that one of the ships docked at Whampoa, the Chang Li, could carry 1,000 passengers and would be sailing to the northern Vietnamese port of Haiphong. Another ship, the Ming Hua, was due to sail to Ho Chi Minh City to pick up 1,400 passengers.

Despite Hanoi's apparent acquiescence to the Chinese plan, relations between the two neighbors appear to have sunk to a new low. The Vietnamese, who have been invaded by the Chinese several times in the last 2,000 years, have always been suspicious of their powerful neighbor.

The Chinese have seemed to return that hostility whenever they perceived that their archenemies, the Soviets, were becoming particularly active in Hanoi. Japanese correspondents reported from Peking over the weekend that Liao Cheng-chih, director of the Office of Overseas Chinese Affairs, said "the Soviet Union is behind the expulsion of Chinese residents from Vietnam."

Refugee reports indicates, however, that Hanoi's actions in closing Chinese shops and denying rations and jobs to Chinese were motivated by a desire to wipe out vestiges of capitalism in the economy and to test the loyalty of Chinese as the country was fighting a war against the Peking-backed Cambodians.